
The Priming of Informationally Weaker Alternatives: Antonyms and Negation

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Abstract

Scalar words ('warm') give rise to implicatures that amount to the negation of the stronger term ('hot'). Ronai and Xiang (2023) found that strong terms are activated during implicature derivation. In three lexical decision experiments, we tested whether even weaker alternatives are activated by introducing negation and antonymity. Negation managed to diffuse priming and antonyms were shown to be primed. This is most compatible with the Alternative Activation Account (Gotzner, 2017), where relevant alternatives are primed, but grammatical and contextual factors can constrain alternatives. Our results highlight the potential of lexical priming to answer questions about alternatives in implicature processing.

Keywords: scalar implicatures, lexical decision, priming, alternatives, scales

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